

TOP SECRET

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106

25X1

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
25 October 1966

State Department review completed

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TOP SECRET

25X1

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25 October 1966

HIGHLIGHTS

Police Director Loan and III Corps commander General Quang are now discounting the likelihood of a southern-backed coup during Premier Ky's visit to Manila. Elections are scheduled to begin on 26 October for major offices in the South Vietnamese constituent assembly.

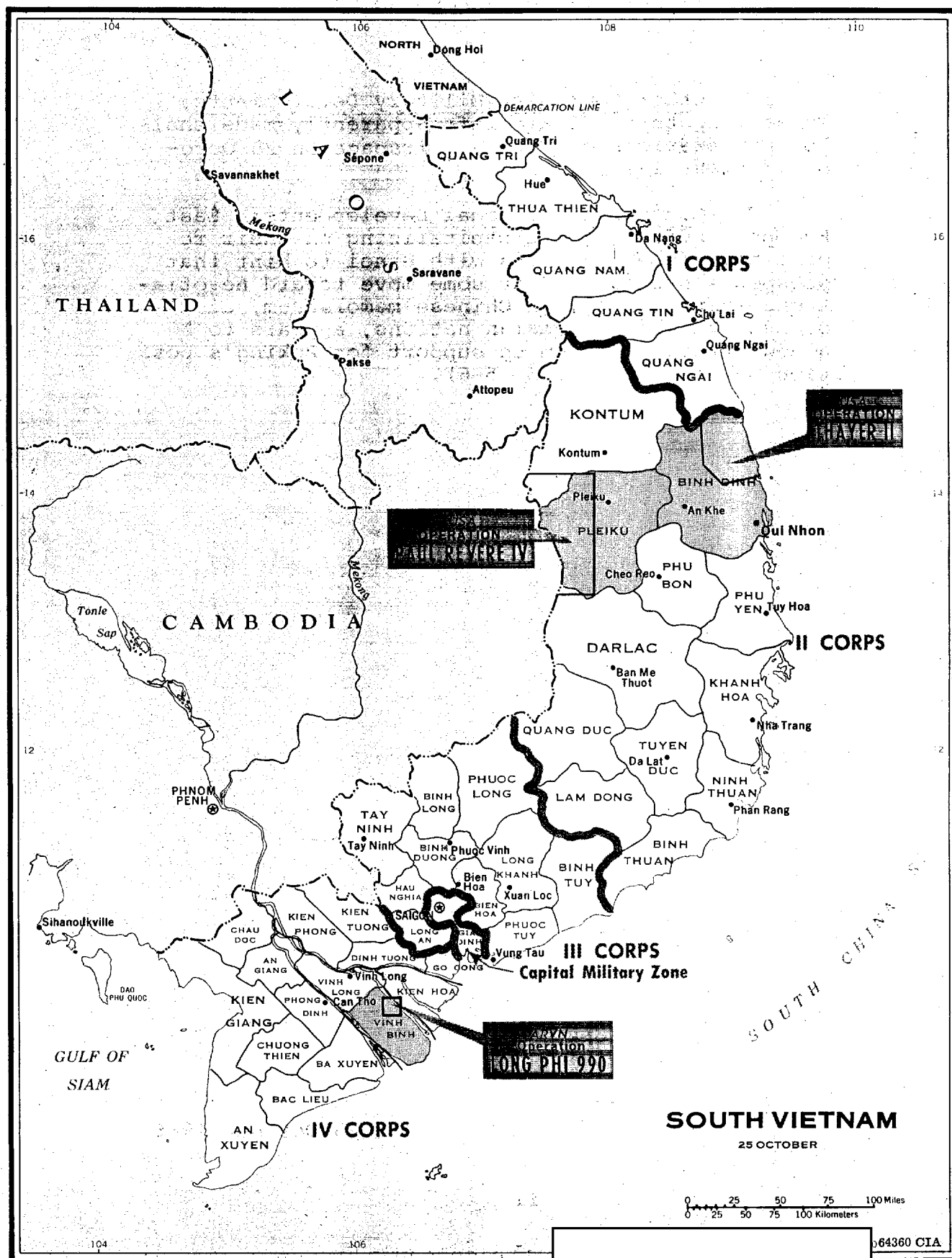
I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Light contact was reported early on 25 October between US forces participating in Operation PAUL REVERE IV in western Pleiku Province and Communist forces (Paras. 1-2), and between company-size Communist and American forces (Para. 3). Allied Operation IRVING ended on 24 October in Binh Dinh Province (Para. 4). Operation THAYER II was started on 25 October by seven US battalions in the northern part of Binh Dinh Province (Para. 5). South Vietnamese troops take a Viet Cong prisoner camp in Vinh Binh Province (Para. 6).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Police Director Loan joined III Corps commander General Khang on 25 October in discounting the likelihood of a southern-backed coup during Premier Ky's absence in Manila, but the issues surrounding the pending cabinet resignations are still very much alive (Paras. 1-3). Three southerners are the main contenders for the post of chairman of the constituent assembly, scheduled to be elected on 26 October (Para. 4). The split in the Buddhist ranks has hardened after the chaotic Unified Buddhist Association Congress ended on 22 October with two separate Institute chairmen and councils in existence (Para. 5).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:
A North Vietnamese shore battery unsuccessfully fired on two US destroyers on a coastal sweep east of Dong Hoi on 25 October (Paras. 1-2).

V. Communist Political Developments: East European officials are capitalizing on their recent high level contacts with Hanoi to hint that prospects are better for some move toward negotiations (Paras. 1-4). A Chinese memorandum, addressed to all Afro-Asian nations, appears to be a new attempt to drum up support for Peking's position on Vietnam (Paras. 5-6).

25 October 1966



I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Light contact between US and Communist forces was reported in the central highlands and in coastal Binh Thuan Province on 25 October.

2. A company of US infantrymen participating in Operation PAUL REVERE IV in western Pleiku Province was attacked by an estimated platoon-size enemy force early on 25 October. Four Americans were killed and eight wounded in a short firefight. Three US armored vehicles were destroyed by command-detonated mines. No enemy losses were reported.

3. In the coastal province of Binh Thuan, a company of the US 1st Air Cavalry Division engaged an estimated company-size Viet Cong force. During the engagement, a US helicopter was shot down by ground fire and two crew members were injured. Total losses were one American killed and four wounded. A total of 48 Viet Cong were killed and two were captured.

Successful Operation in Binh Dinh Ends

4. One of the most successful allied operations to date--Operation IRVING--has ended in coastal Binh Dinh Province. This multibattalion search-and-clear operation, which began on 1 October about 20 miles north of Qui Nhon, trapped a large enemy force against the sea. Communist losses during this joint US - South Vietnamese - South Korean sweep totaled 1,973 killed and 1,765 captured. Allied casualties were 50 killed and 263 wounded. IRVING was supported by 652 tactical air strikes and four naval gunfire missions.

5. Operation THAYER II was initiated in the northern part of Binh Dinh Province on 24 October by seven battalions of the US 1st Air Cavalry Division. A total of 7,600 Communist troops--including the Headquarters of the 610th NVA Division, the 2nd Viet Cong Regiment, the 12th and 22nd NVA

25 October 1966

I-1

Regiments and five subordinate battalions--are believed to be operating in the area.

6. South Vietnamese troops participating in Operation LONG PHI 990, a search-and-destroy operation in the delta province of Vinh Binh, discovered a Viet Cong prison camp about 65 miles south of Saigon on 24 October. In the fight to take the camp, eight South Vietnamese were killed and nine wounded. Viet Cong casualties were reported as 12 killed and one captured. Thirteen South Vietnamese soldiers and five women, including a Catholic nun, were found handcuffed and starving in the camp.

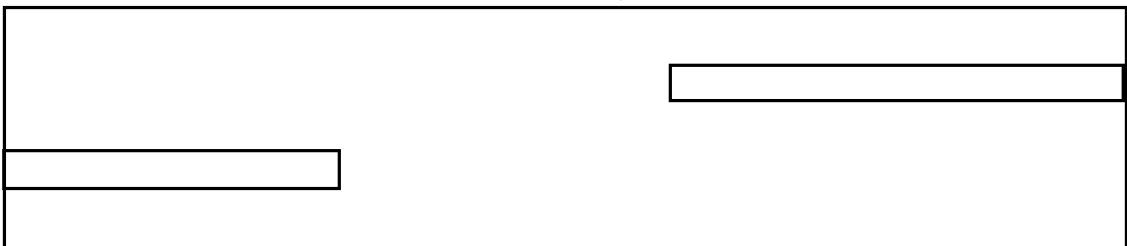
25 October 1966

I-2

II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Police Director Loan has added his voice to that of III Corps commander General Khang in discounting the likelihood of a southern-backed coup during Premier Ky's absence in Manila. Like Khang, Loan also voiced general suspicion of Acting Premier Nguyen Luu Vien, the senior southern cabinet minister whose resignation is still pending.

2. The issues surrounding the pending cabinet resignations are still very much alive. Direct or indirect criticisms of the arrest of a southern subcabinet official on 29 September--which touched off the revolt of the seven southern ministers--have also been raised by eight members of the Peoples - Armed Forces Advisory Council, by the Saigon University Students Union, by the Catholic Archbishopric of Saigon, and by southern regionalists in the constituent assembly. In addition, southern influence in the government has been brought more clearly into focus by recent events. Even such southern moderates as Phan Khac Suu and La Thanh Nghe, both of whom are leading contenders for chairman of the constituent assembly, have voiced concern about excessive northern influence in the government.



tober. Trieu, however, backed away from earlier southern demands for the removal of police chief Loan by declaring that he and "most" of the other ministers would stay on if Ky brought the issue to the Armed Forces Council, the theoretical seat of government power, composed of all general officers and division commanders. According to Trieu, the entire government would submit pro forma resignations, and would be immediately reappointed by the council. Trieu's suggestion apparently constitutes a face-saving procedure by which the ministers could retain their positions.

25 October 1966

II-1

Election of Constituent Assembly Officers

4. With the election of constituent assembly officers scheduled to begin on 26 October, three southerners appear to be the main contenders for the post of chairman. Moderate former chief of state Phan Khac Suu is the general favorite, but he is being opposed by a more militant advocate of southern regionalism, Tran Van Van, who has been campaigning hard for the post. Another southerner, La Thanh Nghe, has declared that he does not wish to oppose Suu directly, but will enter the contest as a compromise candidate should Van and Suu become deadlocked. The election of a nonsoutherner is also possible if the southerners become too entangled. However, the chances are that regional, religious, and other balances will be worked out through the staffing of other assembly posts.

Split in Buddhist Ranks Hardens

5. After the extraordinary Unified Buddhist Association congress ended in chaos on 22 October, militant delegates later met separately and elected their own institute chairman and council membership. The next day, moderate leader Tam Chau declared the election fraudulent, withdrew his own earlier resignation, and declared that he would remain chairman until the expiration of his legal term of office in December 1967. Thus, there are now two separate institute chairmen, moderate Tam Chau and militant Thien Hoa, each with his own supporters and his own headquarters in Saigon.

25 October 1966

25X1

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III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Two US destroyers on a coastal sweep about three miles off the southern North Vietnamese coast were fired on by a DRV shore battery which possibly used 120-mm. howitzers. The destroyers in turn fired on the six gun emplacement. Reports from a US Air Force spotter plane at the scene indicated that numerous fires were burning throughout the shore battery position. Neither of the destroyers was hit. They have been fired on previously while conducting these coastal sweeps.

25X1

25 October 1966

III-1

25X1

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. East European officials are capitalizing on their recent high-level contacts with Hanoi to hint that prospects are better for some move by Hanoi toward negotiations. In general, the East Europeans are recommending a cessation of US bombings as a unilateral step toward a peaceful solution. They argue that such a step would enable the Europeans and the Soviets to increase their influence in Hanoi at the expense of the Chinese. This line, however, is typical of the attitude of the East Europeans toward the Vietnamese war for more than a year. Moreover, these European Communists have carefully avoided any claim to be speaking with Hanoi's authorization. Despite the attempt to portray Hanoi as more flexible, even Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter admitted that the North Vietnamese still insist that their four points form the basis of any political settlement.

2. [redacted] the East Europeans and the Soviets are also attempting to increase their influence in Hanoi by stepping up their military assistance to North Vietnam with the eventual aim of being able to persuade Hanoi to negotiate. A Czech official in London claimed that the recent Moscow conference of Communist leaders decided to increase aid to Hanoi "fourfold" in an apparent effort to offset Chinese influence.

3. A Rumanian official reported that Premier Maurer came back from a recent secret trip to Hanoi convinced that North Vietnam is in a "disastrous economic situation" and that increased assistance is necessary. There is no reliable information from other sources to confirm Maurer's reported evaluation that there has been a sudden and substantial deterioration in the internal situation in North Vietnam.

4. Although the East Europeans claim that increased Soviet and East European assistance offsets

25 October 1966

Chinese influence in Hanoi and will strengthen the hand of those who urge moderation, this aid does, in fact, permit Hanoi to continue the war at its present level.

Chinese Note on Vietnam to Afro-Asian Nations

5. China has requested that all Afro-Asian nations prevent the Vietnam issue from going to the UN, condemn the US for aggression in Vietnam, and demand the withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam.

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6. This memorandum is a new attempt to drum up Afro-Asian support for Peking's position, but its main points appear to be nothing more than a reiteration of long-standing Chinese formulations. The memorandum is probably designed to discourage recent Afro-Asian efforts to bring about a formal UN statement on Vietnam. Early this month Hanoi rejected efforts by a group of UN neutrals who have been pushing a plan to permit the General Assembly to record support for Secretary General Thant's three-point peace proposal.

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